

Community Design



House on Creston Avenue

This area is overwhelmingly suburban in character. The majority of development occurred after World War II. Suburban development is characterized by an orientation to the automobile, wide streets that enable higher speeds, subdivisions of large single-family houses with large front, back, and side yards, and shopping centers and strip commercial establishments with large parking lots in front.

The City annexed land from Roanoke County that was already developed or subdivided with single-family houses on large lots. The Colonial Heights, Fralin Park, and Jefferson Hills neighborhoods all had some development prior to annexation.

Virginia Western Community College was founded in 1966 and continues to grow. The campus spans over 69 acres on both sides of Colonial Avenue. A skywalk over Colonial links the north and south campuses. The north campus has six buildings, six parking lots, and two tennis courts. The south campus has nine buildings, six parking lots, and also includes the Community Arboretum - a public botanical garden on the corner of Colonial Avenue and Winding Way Road. Recently, the college received funding from the Friendship Group, Lewis-Gale Medical Center, and Richfield Retirement Community to expand programs and enrollment in health care fields. The college is currently constructing its College Services Building on the southern side of Colonial Avenue, which will receive and house various supplies and the offices of the campus police.



Colonial Avenue at Virginia Western

Much of the surrounding neighborhoods were already developed prior to the college's development, however a great deal of growth in the City and in Southwest Roanoke County has occurred since then. Whereas the campus was designed and built in a suburban layout, it has gradually become more urban with more buildings and greater volumes of traffic. Colonial Avenue separates the two campuses, but the streetscape is not well suited to pedestrian or bicycle traffic. Improvements to Colonial Avenue should address its impact on Virginia Western and better integrate the streetscape with the campus. Potential improvements to the streetscape of Colonial Avenue through Virginia Western include:

- A landscaped center median through portions of Colonial Avenue where there are no turns
- A stamped or raised crosswalk at the intersection of Colonial Avenue and McNeil Drive
- A roundabout on Colonial Avenue at Winding Way Road



View atop Strother Road

While a couple of Virginia Western's buildings are close to Colonial Avenue, others are set back with large parking lots in the front. Along most of Colonial Avenue, parking lots are the dominant feature of the campus. Future campus



House on Winding Way Road

development on Colonial Avenue should be oriented toward the street with parking to the rear or side. The College Services Building is being constructed in this fashion, and should diminish the visual impact of the parking lots to some degree. Given the growth of the college, a parking garage could add to the campus' appearance and increase the number of parking spaces.

Franklin Road is a four-lane arterial commercial corridor. Most buildings are set back from the street with parking lots in the front, accessed by wide curb cuts. There are a few exceptions on the southern side where some buildings are located at the sidewalk with no front yard. Vision 2001-2020 recommends that commercial corridors such as Franklin Road feature development with buildings on or close to the property line in front, with parking to the rear or side. This development pattern is especially appropriate for this corridor as rocky terrain tends to limit the depth of parking lots.

The terrain on both sides of Franklin Road is hilly. There are several residential developments off of the northern side of Franklin Road that are tucked away and perched above the commercial establishments on the street. These include newer single-family subdivisions and a few apartment complexes. Duke of Gloucester Street provides access to several single-family subdivisions that have been developed since the late 1990s, such as Southwood and Kingsbury Court. At the time of the planning process, development of additional single-family units was underway in this neighborhood. Many of the houses in these subdivisions were

built out to the lot line and are thus very close to one another. Most are one-story, brick veneer, and characterized by a protruding garage on the front that is integrated into the main mass of the structure.

Colonial Avenue is also very hilly west of Virginia Western Community College. This stretch of the street is winding with two lanes through predominantly single-family residential neighborhoods. This part of Colonial Avenue maintains a suburban character until the intersection with Ogden Road and the corporate limits where there are several apartment complexes. Houses tend to be on larger lots with substantial yard space and vegetation.



Kingsbury Lane



House on Forest Road

From Virginia Western east to Brandon Avenue, Colonial Avenue has four lanes and is consistently busy during, and between, peak hours. This stretch of the street lacks curb, gutter and sidewalk, and is unsafe for pedestrians. Its wide profile, especially at VWCC is notorious for speeding traffic, despite heavy pedestrian activity. East of VWCC, no area is allotted for pedestrian traffic. Many houses in the neighborhood off of the northern side of Colonial Avenue lie beneath the grade of the street. This neighborhood is dominated by one-story Ranch and Cottage style houses, but also has a few apartment buildings near Towers Shopping Center.



Intersection of Forest and Winding Way Roads

South of Virginia Western off of Colonial Avenue there are several subdivisions of single-family houses. Jefferson Hills is accessed via Winding Way Road adjacent to Virginia Western. The neighborhood's layout, with its winding streets (hence, Winding Way Road) and abundance of trees, gives it an almost rural character and isolates it from nearby busy areas. The undulating terrain and wooded landscape serve as natural buffers from I-581, Franklin Road and Colonial Avenue. Lots in Jefferson Hills are large—most are over half an acre—and the architecture reflects the styles of the subdivision's origin in the 1950s. The suburban one-story Ranch is the most common architectural style, and brick veneer is the dominant exterior finish.

Further south on the northern side of Colonial Avenue are several other predominantly single-family subdivisions off of Robyn, Wright, and Hartland Roads, and Pasley Avenue. Lots are large in these subdivisions; few are less than 10,000 square feet.



Williamsburg Manor Apartments

Zoning and Land Use



Towers Shopping Center on Colonial Avenue



Edge of Commercial development off of Franklin Road



The title of this plan indicates the most prominent land use patterns of this area. The area of study is largely characterized by the wide commercial corridor of Franklin Road, and the Colonial Avenue corridor that extends southwest from Towers Shopping Center. These two streets run nearly parallel to one another and provide access to all the development in the area.

The zoning and land use can be summarized into four general areas:

- Franklin Road Commercial Corridor - with the exception of the vacant land in the 32-3400 blocks, Franklin Road is a commercial corridor. There are some offices and a mix of commercial uses, including restaurants, gas stations, specialty retail, and car lots.
- Scattered residential off of Franklin Road - subdivisions off of Franklin Road accessed via Roberts Road and Duke of Gloucester Street have a number of new single-family housing units. The latter also features a subdivision with several multifamily units. Several apartment buildings are off of Townside Road.
- Towers Shopping Center and the commercial/residential mix in the vicinity - Towers is a major shopping destination in the City and has generated commercial development on the northeastern end of Colonial Avenue. A small neighborhood lies just to the southwest of the shopping center and there is a mix of residential and commercial along this section of Colonial Avenue.
- Virginia Western Community College and the Jefferson Hills neighborhood to the southwest - southwest of the commercial development on Colonial Avenue, the campuses of Virginia Western and James Madison Middle School represent a transition in the development pattern. Colonial Avenue is void of any commercial development southwest of the 2700 block, and beyond Virginia Western is Jefferson Hills and other single-family neighborhoods with homes on both sides of Colonial Avenue and abutting the railroad tracks.

There are some large undeveloped parcels in the area. Department of Real Estate Valuation data lists 163 properties as vacant, defined by a lack of a building. While some of these properties are parking lots or additional yard space to an adjoining property, there are several large swaths of untouched forest. Most of these large parcels pose challenges to development due to topography, natural barriers and limited access. Examples of such lots are:

- Between the railroad tracks and Franklin Road - several large parcels surround the new subdivisions currently being built upon. Several of these parcels are zoned RPUD and could be developed with a variety of housing units.

Montessori School on Colonial Avenue, Colonial Green site to the rear



Intersection of Pasley Avenue and Bannister Street

- South side of Colonial Avenue - two parcels totaling over 46 acres lie side by side on the southern side of Colonial Avenue just east of the corporate line. The floodway runs through one of these parcels, limiting its development potential. However, there is a substantial amount of land for residential development.
- North side of Colonial Avenue - a City-owned parcel of over 29 acres just east of the corporate line. At present, a proposal for a mixed residential development is being evaluated for this site.

At the time of the planning process, construction of new housing units was underway on a number of lots, most notably in the subdivisions off of Duke of Gloucester Street; Kingsbury Lane and King James Street.



Kingsbury Lane

The suburban development pattern of the area was encouraged by past zoning policies, which required a large number of parking spaces, small lot coverage ratios, and large setback distances from streets. This type of development resulted in unused parking spaces and buildings on lots with large amounts of unused land. In addition, zoning patterns encouraged strip development along Franklin Road. The development pattern of the area today still reflects this suburban orientation.

Over the years, development has crept farther from downtown and the core of the City. Once isolated neighborhoods are now close to commercial establishments with neon signs and street lights. While the vast majority of the houses in the area do not abut commercial development, commercial zoning districts need to be clearly delineated and their boundaries maintained to prevent further encroachment upon residential areas.

Community Design Issues

- Lack of integration between different uses and neighborhoods
- Encroachment of commercial uses into neighborhoods
- Limited green/open space in some areas
- Overabundance of underused pavement



House on Winding Way Road

